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ABSTRACT

The official position on the workload of college teachers of English adopted by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) discusses factors bearing upon the determination of a reasonable teaching schedule. Evaluation of student composition, grading fatigue, class size, conference hours, research, committees, clubs, lectures, and class visitations are commented on. The adoption of the suggested NCTE standards is urged. (RL)

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The Official Position of the
National Council of Teachers of English

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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The Workload of a College English Teacher

A Statement of Policy

The following statement of policy, developed by a committee of the Council as a result of discussion at the 1965 Annual Business Meeting, was adopted officially at the 1966 meeting of the Board of Directors of the National Council of Teachers of English.

The National Council of Teachers of English supports the following statement on factors involved in the total workload of English teachers and, further, endorses the concluding set of recommendations on teaching load.

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The Teaching Load and the Quality of Instruction

Even though colleges differ in nature, size, and purpose, most English instruction is carried on in traditionally structured classes by individual teachers with little or no human or mechanical assistance. The teacher stands in front of students—the question is: how many and how often? In other words, what is an equitable teaching load for an English teacher? Experiments of many kinds have been tried, including television, team teaching, and various combinations of large and small sections. Further experiment should be encouraged. But no experiment is likely to change the hard facts of English teaching. It is important, despite the differences among colleges, to describe major factors that must be considered in determining teaching loads and the variety of experiments.

The most important factor is the criticism of student writing. Although individual teachers in other disciplines share the task of helping students develop their skills in composition, the primary responsibility is charged to the English department. Each English teacher, therefore must provide the opportunity for practice and the sympathetic guidance which inexperienced writers require. In freshman classes, compositions may be assigned as frequently as once per week; but if the student is to benefit, his writing must be guided by the instructor's careful evaluation of the papers and by suggestions made in individual conferences.

Criticism, which takes place outside of class, consumes an impressive amount of time. A teacher of freshman composition can at best evaluate four or five themes an hour. If he has fifty students, he spends at least ten to twelve hours examining each set. Even if he is assisted by readers, he must take time to train them and, periodically, must read compositions himself, both to assure the maintenance of uniform standards and to observe the progress of individual students.

Even though fewer papers may be assigned in other English courses, the essays are longer, more complex, and more difficult than freshman themes and therefore demand more from the instructor. Two or three such evaluations an hour is a very good rate. Grading a set of papers for a class of twenty-five occupies eight to ten hours.

Compounding the problem of evaluation is the cumulative effect of what might be called grading fatigue. Conceivably, any teacher could grade one hundred or more themes in one week. But in each succeeding week he would become psychologically less capable of giving the same care to the same number. It is not that he decides that he cannot do it; it is rather that, gradually, he loses the ability to approach each paper with a fresh concern for it as a unique piece of writing. Because of grading fatigue, most English teachers cannot evaluate with maximum efficiency for more than an average of ten to twelve hours each week—the time required to grade a set of fifty freshman compositions or twenty-five to thirty papers from advanced students.

If a teacher is to guide an inexperienced writer satisfactorily, he cannot limit his effort to written comments and grades; he must frequently confer with his students. Since most conferences require at least twenty minutes, an instructor who spends a reasonable five or six hours per week seeing students can confer with only fifteen individuals each week.

It is essential, then, that the total number of students assigned to an instructor be sufficiently limited to permit him to supervise their development without exceeding an average of more than ten to twelve hours per week for grading and five to six hours per week for conferences.

It is also essential that the enrollment in each class be limited to a number which fosters the kind of instruction required for that particular course. The teaching of composition and literature at an introductory level can be done best, perhaps only, in classes small enough to permit discussion. Similarly, honors programs and seminar classes depend upon the individual guidance provided for each student. Enrollment in such classes must be severely restricted.

A further reason for limiting enrollment in classes is the psychological benefit to the student. As classes swell to accommodate the increasing numbers of students swarming onto campuses, the individual student may feel that his identity is lost in the mass. In small English classes, however, the individualized reactions to his writings, the conferences with the instructor, and the opportunity to participate in classroom discussions may reassure him that he counts as a person.

In establishing teaching loads, attention must also be given to the time required for class preparation, study, and thought. Preparation time varies according to the complexity and the level of the course. Also, more time is needed to prepare for a course not taught formerly than for one being repeated. Conversely, less time is needed to prepare to teach several sections of the same course than is needed to prepare to teach several different courses. Care must be taken, however, to prevent the stupefying monotony which results if a teacher's assignments habitually restrict him to several sections of the same course. On the other hand, no teacher should be burdened with more new preparations than he can competently handle.

Time for study and thought to keep abreast of developments is another aspect of the teaching load. English is not a static field; it demands constant professional growth. A teacher who must expend all of his time and energy in duties related to his classes cannot hope to familiarize himself with new approaches to language, with new emphases in rhetoric, and with current literature and literary criticism. And it is not

enough simply to keep up with developments—teachers must, indeed will want to, make their own scholarly and professional contributions.

When scholarly research is supported by the federal government or another outside agency, a specific portion of the instructor's time is allotted to the project. Frequently, however, unsupported scholarship, though it is expected, even demanded, by the institution, is not considered in the determination of teaching loads. The importance of sound and imaginative scholarship can scarcely be exaggerated, but instructors should not be expected to compromise their own teaching standards in order to make scholarly contributions.

English teachers also serve on committees, sponsor student clubs, offer public lectures, organize conferences for elementary and secondary school teachers, and visit public schools. Some involvement in such activities constitutes a regular part of a teacher's professional responsibility, but heavy involvement should be recognized. A series of lectures, several visits to schools during a term, chairmanship of an important standing committee, responsibility for advising a large number of students: assignments such as these should be counted as part of the total load, not just added to it.

Similarly, consideration should be given to a teacher's contributions to professional organizations. Service as an officer in a regional or national body, chairmanship of an important committee, work for a committee preparing a significant report or pamphlet: these responsibilities should be counted as part of a teacher's service to his profession and to his institution.

The task of determining a teaching load is never simple. The assignment is reasonable, however, if the enrollment in each class is sufficiently limited to permit the kind of instruction required in the course and if the load allows the teacher adequate time to prepare for, teach, evaluate, and guide his students and to fulfill his other obligations to his department, his institution, and his profession.

Recommendations

In the interests of better English teaching, the National Council of Teachers of English recommends that all two year and four year colleges and all universities take the preceding factors into account in determining teaching loads for English teachers and that the English faculty be given the opportunity to participate in formulating an equitable and flexible policy governing teaching loads in English.

The NCTE urges adoption of the following standards:

1. A weekly teaching load of no more than nine hours should be considered the standard load for college teachers of English. And *under no circumstances* should any English teacher's weekly load exceed 12 hours.
2. No college English teacher should be obligated to prepare more than three different courses during any academic semester, quarter, or term.
3. Ordinarily no one's teaching load should be composed exclusively of sections of a single course.
4. In all writing courses—especially in freshman composition courses (including remedial, noncredit, or nontransfer courses)—a reasonable class size is 20 students. In no case should these classes exceed 25 students.
5. Ideally no English teacher should teach more than 50 composition students; under no circumstances should he teach more than 75.
6. All other English courses should be small enough ~~and~~ to should be so organized to provide ample opportunities for discussion, student writing, student conferences, and the close evaluation of student writing.
7. Professional, scholarly, and institutional activities should be taken into account in determining teaching loads.

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